

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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P 161614Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3839
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER AMCONSULS CANADA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 05163

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: POSSIBILITY OF EARLY FEDERAL ELECTIONS

REF: A) QUEBEC 220; B) OTTAWA 4943

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AS INDICATED IN REF B, RESULTS OF JUNE 9 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS DAMPENED ENTHUSIASM OF SOME FEDERAL/LIBERAL STRATEGISTS FOR EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN THE FALL. NONETHELESS, THERE ARE OTHERS IN THE PARTY WHO CONTINUE TO FAVOR EARLY ELECTIONS. FOLLOWING IS OUR ANALYSIS OF PROS AND CONS ON THIS SUBJECT WHICH ARE BEING PRESENTED TO TRUDEAU. WE BELIEVE THE CONS ARE LIKELY TO BE DETERMINATIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. MOST OBVIOUS ARGUMENT FOR FALL ELECTION WOULD BE TO CAPITALIZE ON GROWING LIBERAL POLLING LEAD WHICH NOW RESTS AT 15 PERCENTAGE POINTS OVER PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) OPPOSITION. PM TRUDEAU HAS CLEARLY STAKED OUT NATIONAL UNITY ISSUE AS HIS OWN AND, IF ELECTION WERE FOUGHT WITH THIS ISSUE PREDOMINANT (AS WOULD BE LIKELY), PCS AND THEIR LEADER JOE CLARK WOULD BE ALMOST
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CERTAIN LOSERS. ELECTORATE, ON OTHER HAND, MIGHT OVER NEXT YEAR TIRE OF SEEMINGLY ENDLESS DEBATE ON NATIONAL UNITY, AND OTHER ISSUES, NOTABLY A FALTERING ECONOMY WITH HIGH LEVELS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION, MIGHT LOOM LARGER, TO BENEFIT OF OPPOSITION. UPSHOT IS DESIRE OF SOME LIBERAL STRATEGISTS TO STRIKE WHILE NATIONAL UNITY IRON IS HOT.

3. SECOND ARGUMENT FOR FALL ELECTION (AND RELATED TO POINT ONE) WOULD BE TO REINFORCE LIBERAL/TRUDEAU MANDATE AS LEADER OF THE FEDERALIST FORCES ARRAYED AGAINST PARTI QUEBECOIS (PQ) AND PREMIER LEVESQUE. CONVINCING VICTORY ACROSS COUNTRY COULD BE INTERPRETED AS A STRONG ENDORSEMENT BY THE ELECTORATE OF CONTINUED NATIONAL UNITY.

4. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, SEVERAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST CALLING FALL ELECTION. FIRST, AS NOTED IN REFTTEL ON ONTARIO ELECTIONS, ELECTORATE NOW HAS LOW TOLERANCE FOR EARLY ELECTIONS WITHOUT CRUCIAL ISSUES AND BASED PRIMARILY ON POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY. LIBERALS WOULD CERTAINLY ATTEMPT CONVINCE VOTERS THAT RENEWED TRUDEAU MANDATE AS LEADING FIGURE IN NATIONAL UNITY STRUGGLE WAS A MAJOR ISSUE. VOTERS, HOWEVER, MIGHT QUESTION WHY THIS WAS ANY MORE AN ISSUE IN FALL OF 1977 RATHER THAN IN SPRING OF 1978 WHEN ELECTIONS ARE DUE IN ORDINARY COURSE.

5. SECOND, TRUDEAU COULD, OF COURSE, INTRODUCE DRAMATIC NEW ELEMENT IN NATIONAL UNITY PICTURE WITHIN NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, BUT NO SUCH ELEMENT IS NOW DISCERNIBLE OR LIKELY. GREEN PAPER ON FEDERAL LANGUAGE POLICY IS EXPECTED WITHIN A MONTH, BUT MEMBER OF PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (PMO) TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR CANDIDLY TO EXPECT NO MAJOR NEW DIRECTIONS IN THIS FIELD. FURTHER, NATIONAL UNITY COMMISSION, HEADED BY JEAN-LUC PEPIN, FORMER CHIEF OF ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM, AND JOHN ROBARTS, FORMER PREMIER OF ONTARIO, WILL BE FORMED SHORTLY, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL IMPACT BY TIME OF POSSIBLE FALL ELECTION.

6. PIPELINE SITUATION COULD ALSO WORK AGAINST AN EARLY ELECTION, PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF TIMING PROBLEMS. GOVERNMENT HAS AGREED WITH OPPOSITION FOR FULL COMMONS DEBATE OF PIPELINE ISSUE. THIS DEBATE IS LIKELY SOMETIME IN AUGUST AFTER REPORT OF NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD (NEB) AND LYSYK REPORT ON ALCAN ROUTE. HOUSE MAY ADJOURN IN JULY AND RECONVENE IN AUGUST FOR PIPELINE DEBATE. TO PERMIT FALL ELECTIONS, ELECTION WRIT DISSOLVING PARLIAMENT AND IN EFFECT OPENING 60 DAY ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN WOULD HAVE TO FOLLOW CLOSE ON HEELS OF PIPELINE DEBATE IN MID OR LATE AUGUST. QUEEN WILL BE VISITING OTTAWA IN MID-OCTOBER, AND EVERYONE AGREES THAT ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN WOULD HAVE TO BE OVER BY TIME OF HER VISIT. THUS, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THERE WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TIME BETWEEN END OF PIPELINE DEBATE AND ARRIVAL OF QUEEN TO PERMIT FALL ELECTIONS.

7. QUITE APART FROM TIMING PROBLEMS OF PIPELINE ISSUE, GOVERNMENT WOULD BE FACED WITH DIFFICULT SITUATION ON PIPELINE DECISION IF FALL ELECTIONS CALLED. GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO PIPELINE DECISION BY SEPT 1 AND FOLLOW-UP NEGOTIATIONS WITH US TO IMPLEMENT DECISION. WITH PARLIAMENT DISSOLVED AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW CABINET COULD MAKE DECISION AS LAME-DUCK AND IN CHARGED ATMOSPHERE OF CAMPAIGN.

8. COMMENT: WEIGHING PROS AND CONS OF FALL ELECTION, WE BELIEVE THAT TRUDEAU WILL DECIDE AGAINST EARLY ELEC-

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 OTTAWA 05163

TIONS. INCENTIVE OF CAPITALIZING ON HIGH LEVEL OF TRUDEAU/LIBERAL POPULARITY IS STRONG, BUT TIMING DIFFICULTIES AND PUBLIC ANIMOSITY TO ELECTIONS WITHOUT OVERRIDING ISSUES SHOULD TIP BALANCE IN FAVOR OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING OF 1978. ENDERS

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